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**Title :** Surveys of dugongs(Dugong dugon)and their habitat in Cambodia and Vietnam

**Category :** Conservation

**Student :**

**Preferred Format :** Either Oral or Poster Presentation

**Abstract :** In much of Southeast Asia, little is known of the present population abundance or distribution of dugongs. We interviewed local fishers and conducted seagrass habitat surveys along the coasts of Cambodia and southern Vietnam in summer of 2002. The general objectives were: (1) to interview local fishermen about the status of dugongs and seagrass (2) to investigate fishing gear that causes injury to dugongs and destroys seagrass habitat; (3) to survey seagrass areas in order to know the density, species, and status of seagrass habitat; (4) to learn what the local people believe about dugongs, such as the usage and sales of dugong parts as food, medicine, and amulets, and myths/legends about dugongs; and (5) to learn the opinions of the local people regarding dugongs and seagrass conservation. As a result of these interviews, we discovered that one of the largest problems for dugongs in Cambodia and Vietnam is that of being caught in various types of fishing nets. An accurate estimate of dugong mortalities caused by fishing cannot be made because these incidents are not reported to any agency or government official. Neither of these countries has endangered species legislation or actual laws that protect marine animals from either incidental bycatch or direct hunting. In both countries, both artisanal and commercial fisheries are recovering from the effects of prolonged wars. In Cambodia, dugongs caught in fishing nets are considered an opportunistic catch, as the body parts of the animal are worth a comparatively large amount of money as meat, medicine, and amulets. In Vietnam, as well as accidental bycatch, villagers in areas of dugong habitat invest in special nets to hunt dugongs for the same reason. If these actions continue to be unregulated, the numbers of dugongs in both of these countries will continue to decline into extinction.